

year with a proud record of providing real support for our Nation's veterans that starts to make up for lost time. We have passed historic increases in veterans health care benefits totaling nearly \$12 billion to meet the needs of those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, to make up for the President's past shortchanging of our veterans and to keep new fees from hitting veterans families.

Along with focusing on veterans who are returning with PTSD and traumatic brain injuries, we address the military health and disability crisis brought to light by the conditions at Walter Reed Hospital, and we are providing the necessary oversight to ensure a scandal like that never happens again.

This new Democratic majority is also working to make sure troops and their families, strained after multiple deployments in Iraq, get a 3.5 percent pay increase, which the President called unnecessary.

Mr. Speaker, we commemorated Veterans Day this past weekend. Democrats are proud of our accomplishments in honoring our veterans by providing them with health care benefits they deserve.

□ 0915

TARDINESS IN CONGRESS

(Mr. AKIN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. AKIN. Mr. Speaker, one of the things that can be a problem here in Congress is tardiness or lateness. And we've certainly seen some examples of that. One of the examples is the alternative minimum tax. It's something that every year just keeps reaching down and taxing more and more Americans. And so through the last years, Republicans passed patches to push that alternative minimum tax back. Unfortunately, this year, we're late. We don't have that done. The IRS has got to have that done by tomorrow, or else they're going to take a whole long time to change tax forms, and 50 million Americans will have their tax returns and the money that's owed them by the government late because we're just not on time with getting the AMT patch fixed.

It's also true with the veterans bill. We passed a bill, Republicans and Democrats agreed to it, put more money into the veterans, take care of post-traumatic stress and all kinds of other things that are expenses that the veterans face. The trouble is that bill's been sitting around. We're late again. Let's get a move on.

DEMOCRATIC CONGRESS HAD TO FIGHT PRESIDENT BUSH ALL THE WAY ON THE VETERANS FUNDING BILL

(Mr. PALLONE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, last week this House passed a final veterans funding bill that provides the largest investment in veterans health care in the 77-year history of the VA. Congress initially passed this legislation over the opposition of President Bush and his administration.

Now, back in June, then Bush budget director, Rob Portman, said that the Bush administration would veto the Homeland Security measure as well as an even more generous bill funding veterans health programs and construction at military bases.

One week later, when this House was about to vote on the legislation, the White House sent over a letter saying that planned increases to veterans were excessive.

And then in August, the President directed his VA Secretary to send Congress a letter letting them know that veterans didn't really need \$3.7 billion we had included over the President's request.

Mr. Speaker, it's clear that, until recently, President Bush and his administration did not believe we should fulfill our promises to our Nation's veterans. The President's paper trail is clear, and had it not been for this Democratic Congress, our veterans would not now be one step closer to the historic funding increase.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE COURAGEOUS SHAWNEE STATE UNIVERSITY MEN'S SOCCER TEAM

(Mrs. SCHMIDT asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. SCHMIDT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a team of courageous student athletes from Portsmouth, Ohio.

On Sunday, October 28, the Shawnee State University men's soccer team, fresh off their final victory of the season, traveled back to campus to find themselves facing another battle. This was a battle they'd never imagined having to face.

These men witnessed an SUV plunge over an embankment, hit a tree, roll over several times, and land on its top in a creek.

The bus filled with Shawnee State soccer players pulled to the side and went to the rescue. What they found at the bottom of the dark ravine was a family trapped, a family of three. The soccer team broke the vehicle's windows and rescued all the family members safely. Thankfully, the family is alive and well today.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in recognizing these amazing student athletes of Shawnee State University: Paul Adkins, Ryan Appell, Bryan Barker, Jordan Buck, Barry Collins, Michael Cornell, Steven Cox, Rocky Dunkin, Danny Frantz, Ross Frantz, Chris George, Curtis Jones, Andrew Kachilla, Bobby Krauss, Matt Lonsinger, Michael Mohr, Rusty Ortman, Graham

Purdy, Brad Reffitt, Kurt Rininger, Drew Sampson, Ken Shonkwiler, Weston Thobaben, Jonathon Venters, and head coach Ron Goodson for their incredible act of heroism and bravery.

And let's say a prayer that the family continues to do well.

JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE IRAQ WAR REPORT

(Mrs. MALONEY of New York asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mrs. MALONEY of New York. Mr. Speaker, last night House Democrats voted to send the President a smaller war-funding package with a clear message, send our troops home now. We know this rapid redeployment will save countless American lives.

The Joint Economic Committee estimates that a sharp downturn in U.S. forces in Iraq, like the plan we are advancing, would also lower the war's economic costs by about \$2 trillion over the next 10 years.

The cost of this war has simply been too great and the human toll too high. We have already lost more people than this country lost on 9/11, 162 from my home State of New York. In so many ways, we can no longer afford to stay in Iraq.

Democrats in Congress are committed to bringing our troops home soon; repairing our military; caring for our veterans; and charting a new, more responsible, course, a more secure course in Iraq.

IN RECOGNITION OF MICKI WORK

(Mr. WILSON of South Carolina asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to say farewell and best wishes to a long-time member of the Second District staff, Micki Work. Micki has been a member of the staff more than 5 years where she has served with integrity and professionalism. She will be leaving our office to join the Magazine Publishers of America as the vice president for government affairs.

Micki came to Capitol Hill as an intern on the House Ways and Means Committee. After serving as a staff assistant to Representative GARY MILLER of California, she joined our office as a legislative correspondent. Her hard work and dedication led her to assume the role of legislative director, where she has been invaluable in helping me address the needs and concerns of the people of the Second District of South Carolina.

A native of Hilton Head Island and a graduate of Hilton Head Christian School and Clemson University, Micki is the daughter of Dorothy Howard and the late Edward "Mickey" Howard. Our office will miss Micki tremendously, and we wish her well in all of her future endeavors.